



King County

# Health Heroes

*Health Leadership Forum IV*

Dear Friend

On any given day more than 13 thousand employees of King County can be found working in hundreds of worksites, ranging from seaside to forest stream, from downtown office to maintenance facility, from patrol car to Metro bus. King County is a place of extraordinary diversity in the types of workplaces we spend so much of our lives in.

Since its inception in 2004 King County's Health Reform Initiative has been based on the idea that empowering employees to play a greater role in their own well-being is the key to making better health care choices, choices that ultimately control cost.

In King County some of these employees are called Health Heroes. They come from every corner of the county and all the workplaces in between. What their successes all have in common is a supportive environment in the workplace.



Enclosed in these you'll find a small sampling of their stories. You can find many more in the upcoming issue of *Health Matters* and online at the Focus on Employees website.

I hope you'll find these personal stories of triumph an inspiration.



## Harold Taniguchi and Laurie Brown

### *Department of Transportation*

Since the Healthy Incentives<sup>SM</sup> program began, the Director's Office at the Department of Transportation has changed from a place where people eat candy bars for breakfast to a place where people share healthy recipes. At the center of this change are the department's Director and Deputy Director, Harold Taniguchi and Laurie Brown.

Harold used to like the idea of being healthy, but was not very motivated to take action to make exercise part of his daily life. He belonged to as many as three gyms around town, but would not go to any.

These days, Harold works out regularly with a personal trainer and watches what he eats. The impetus for this change was a visit to his doctor where Harold found out he was at risk for diabetes.

His doctor recommended changes to his diet and regular exercise as a way to reverse the trend. The culture of wellness in the county is what gave Harold the support to do just that. Harold also saw

the value in modeling healthy behavior as the director of a department. "There is a relationship between people who are healthy in the workplace and how they perform their job," he said.

It wasn't long after Harold started talking about how great he felt before Laurie Brown decided to set her own goals. She started the South Beach diet with her husband and "Not to be outdone by Harold, I started working out," she laughs.

Harold and Laurie agree that a key for both of them was taking ownership of their own health.

"You have to make the decision for yourself," says Harold. "It didn't help me much to just have the gym membership. Once I made the decision to make a difference that was what worked."

Laurie echoes this sentiment. "For me it works when it becomes something I own and not for financial incentives. I think it happened because of the environment."

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*"There is a relationship between people who are healthy in the workplace and how they perform their job."*

*-- Harold Taniguchi*

## Daisy Daily

Daisy Daily first started thinking about losing weight when she hit her highest weight ever and started having trouble performing her job with the Renton Roads crew in the Department of Transportation. When she noticed her daughter mimicking her own eating habits, she thought that by being a role model for good health she could free her daughter from the consequences of “carrying an extra load,” which Daisy had for most of her life.

First, Daisy visited her doctor to discuss her weight loss options so she could steer clear of the ineffective or unhealthy diets out there. Under doctor supervision, Daisy opted for a low-carb diet. “The first thing I did was spoil myself on steak and seafood,” she laughs. Regular exercise was also an important part of Daisy’s new routine. She started with 20 minutes five times a week on the treadmill and soon was hiking up Mt. Si. She has lost over 100 pounds.

She credits Healthy Incentives<sup>SM</sup> with keeping her on track. The first year she took coaching calls, the second year she did “Colorful Choices” and this year “Get Fit on Route 66,” which is her favorite. “I really liked the e-mail tips,” she said. Daisy also relies

on the *Health Matters* newsletter for fresh ideas so her efforts to maintain her good health don’t get stale.

Daisy has also found support at her worksite from colleagues and her supervisor. She and about 30 of her colleagues participated in a “poker walk” during Public Health week where they walked around a site and stopped to pick up cards along the way. The person with the best hand at the end got a gift certificate to Subway and everyone got a pedometer.

“They’ve given me a lot of praise through this whole process. They’ve been right there beside me the whole time routing me on, saying ‘Come on, you can do it.’”

For Daisy, losing weight is about good health and being a positive role model for her daughters. “I don’t think it should matter about your shape or size. It’s about being healthy. I’m a much better role model for my daughters now. My oldest daughter started following in my footsteps and started not making the best choices with her eating habits. Watching me eating better and exercising more and having a healthy lifestyle has made her follow that example. We’re a lot more

active and healthy family.”

To other county employees striving to improve their health, Daisy says “You’re worth it. You will live a much better life not being restricted.”



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*-- Daisy Daily*



## Steve Witkowski and Jim Pitts



Jim Pitts and Steve Witkowski work together at the South Point Wastewater Treatment plant. Jim nominated Steve to be a King County Health Hero after Steve's health improvements inspired Jim to make improvements of his own.

When Jim returned to the Treatment Plant after working for a time offsite, he noticed Steve's "different stature." Indeed, during Jim's absence, Steve had lost 53 pounds. He has also lowered his cholesterol from 300 to 163 and his blood pressure from 145/181 to 116/71.

The impetus for Steve to improve his health came after taking the wellness assessment and deciding that he needed to go to his doctor to get a baseline on his health. The exam revealed high blood pressure, high cholesterol and type 2 diabetes. Having seen his mother suffer type 1 diabetes, Steve decided to improve his health.

Steve and Jim ended up walking together during King County's Public Health Week walks and as Jim talked to Steve about his improved health, realized that he had a lot in common with Steve, including a family history of diabetes. Jim was inspired to take similar steps to improve his own health.

For both men, a pedometer has been a key tool for moving more. Both use the pedometers they got during Public Health Week to track their steps and meet their goal of taking at least 10,000 steps daily. Jim makes conscious choices to boost his steps like parking at the end of the parking lot. On the nights he umpires Little League, he can get as many as 15,000 steps.

Steve's advice to others striving to improve their health is to take small steps. A train commuter, he took small steps throughout the spring to be able to ride his bike all of the way home. First he got off one stop before home, then two stops before home until he was able to ride all of the way home.

For Jim, the key was doing it with someone else. "You need to be able to do it with someone else to keep you going and for inspiration."

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*"You need to be able to do it with someone else to keep you going and for inspiration."*

*-- Jim Pitts*

## Mary Roberts

Superior Court Judge Mary Roberts has always run a high performance courtroom and now she and her colleagues have joined together to be a high performance athletic team. The “Ultimate Fitness Court” to be exact, one of the winning teams from last year’s Live Well Challenge.

“We’re all very competitive people,” she said, “When we saw an opportunity to compete and win prizes -- and show up our co-workers -- we took it.”

Mary, her bailiff and two clerks all had different health issues and came together to inspire each other.

For Mary, the personal motivation is aging. “I am going to turn 50 this year and I have hit that place where I am afraid if I don’t get it together now, I’ll never get it together.”

Working with her younger bailiff and clerks helped motivate her. These 20 and 30-something’s didn’t want to be out performed by someone nearing her 50s.

Mary started eating better and exercising more as part of her Live Well Challenge team, which continued to gain traction after the contest ended. Mary ran a half marathon, her bailiff did the Seattle-

to-Portland bike race, one of her clerks took on the Danskin Triathlon while the other entered the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure.

“I never ran a step until I was 45 and last fall I ran a half marathon. I didn’t believe I could run a mile and I ran over 13 miles and this year I am training for a full marathon.”

Mary used her position as a supervisor to adjust the schedule to accommodate her staff’s exercise routines. She also relaxed typical court standards in the name of efficiency and stress relief. “I don’t mind if my staff has wet hair after lunch (after they exercise). We got a couple of comments about the wet hair, but when we told people it was because we ran up Capitol Hill, we didn’t hear any more flak about it.”

For Mary, her colleagues have been key to her success. “It’s not like I am the leader. We all encourage each other.”



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*“It’s not like I am the leader.*

*We all encourage each other.”*

*-- Mary Roberts*

## Laura McCollum Wallace

Laura McCollum Wallace is a computer nerd by day, a belly dancer by night and a health hero to her colleagues at DDES. She was named DDES' 2007 Employee of the Year in large part for how her health improvements inspired others.

Laura's "aha" moment came when she saw a picture of herself belly dancing in a parade. At 252 lbs. and with a family history of diabetes, she realized she needed to do something to improve her health. So she turned to something she loved, belly dancing.

Her version of belly dancing is called powerbellies. She dances up to 1 1/2 hour with a 13 pound belt on her hips. She has lost 73 pounds and gone from high risk to low risk. She attributes her success to working with her Healthways coach and the supportive environment at DDES, a place where walkers gather in the lobby every day at noon.

"I hadn't really realized how much I was eating until I started talking to my health coach." Her coached helped her make smarter choices about what she ate, portion size and when she ate. "My

health coach really made me think and held me accountable."

Laura's success has moved her co-workers to improve their health. Walking, hula hooping and weight loss are some of the ways her co-workers have pursued their goals for good health. All have been inspired by Laura's message to "find something you are passionate about and follow it."

What they see in Laura is a confidence and spirit that comes from good health. "She is expressing her beauty from inside not just outside."



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*"My health coach really made me think and held me accountable."*

*-- Laura McCollum Wallace*



## Jessica Cline

After years of see-saw dieting, Jessica Cline, a detective with the Sheriff's Office in Kent, stopped "waiting for Monday" to start improving her health and instead began "living for today." The wake up call was when she rushed her daughter to the hospital with abdominal pain. The diagnosis was a kidney infection.

"What was happening in her body was not healthy," says Jessica, who knew it was time to start helping her daughter develop life long healthy habits. She knew it started with her.

Three days later, Jessica received a global e-mail about the county's Weight Watchers and Work<sup>®</sup> program. Weight Watchers had the structure and the content to help Jessica learn how to eat smart and move more. The sense of camaraderie with her colleagues in the same program was important to Jessica.

"We're all on the same path with the same goal," she says.

But change is never easy and when Jessica's enthusiasm flagged in the midst of her weight loss journey she again turned to family for inspiration. "I

started thinking that I had extra time with my father (at the end of his life) because he took care of himself. I had all of those extra memories."

So Jessica re-dedicated herself to a healthy lifestyle. "I am 68 pounds lighter. But, I am not doing this for a dress size or a reunion. It was something I had to change and never look back. I want to be fit for duty. I don't want to just be average I want to be better than that."

Jessica has not only changed what she eats, but how she relates to food. "I look at food as a way to fuel my body for my next workout. Not for comfort or to escape."

Of her ongoing commitment to staying healthy, Jessica says, "I can't predict what will happen in five years but I can say if I am healthy now I will be better longer. If not for me, then for my family."

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*"We're all on the same path with the same goal,"*

*-- Jessica Cline*



## Dr. Emily Transue

Dr. Emily Transue is a primary care doctor at the Polyclinic who has seen the Healthy Incentives<sup>SM</sup> program motivate many King County employees to take ownership of their health.

"I started having patients walk in the door saying 'I need to have a healthier lifestyle,' which was a bit of a shock since most of the time it's the other way around. I had all of these people coming in saying I need to exercise, I need to quit smoking."

Dr. Transue credits Healthy Incentives<sup>SM</sup> with giving people the motivation to make positive changes to their health. "It's been a wonderful springboard because usually the position we are in on the medical side is cleaning up after things have gone wrong or saying 'you need to do this, you need to do that'... What this has become is a real way to get more traction and really get people moving in the right direction."

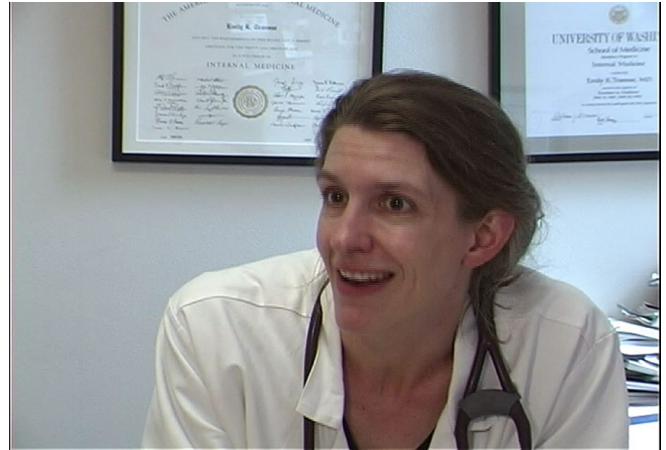
Dr. Transue says the work King County has done to create a workplace supportive of healthy habits helps remove barriers to good health and gives people positive role models for inspiration.

Health promotion activities like the Live Well Challenge and the Public Health Week walks can keep people motivated.

"So many people have an unhealthy culture at work. But that's where behavior is really happening. You don't come into the doctor's office once a year and determine your behaviors based on that half hour."

To reinforce the importance of workplace culture in encouraging healthy habits, Dr. Transue points to recent studies that show how much people's friends and colleagues impact their behavior. The studies, which have appeared in medical literature show that people tend to quit smoking in clusters. Other studies show that when one person in a group of friends or colleagues loses weight, it is more likely the others will too.

"What makes (Healthy Incentives) so important is that you are tackling behavior where it happens."



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*-- Dr.Emily Transue*